



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION FWP PROPOSAL & INFORMATION SHEET

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Meeting Date: June 20, 2024

Agenda Item: Rancher Ditch Addition to the Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area

Action Needed: Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Minutes

Background: FWP proposes an approximate 414-acre addition to the Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area (WMA) by fee title acquisition. The WMA, located west of Hysham, comprises two separate units. The west unit is accessible by county road, and the east unit can only be accessed by the public via the Yellowstone River (see map). This proposed acquisition would establish one contiguous WMA by acquiring in fee title the private parcel that separates the east and west units.

In addition to establishing one contiguous WMA, this proposal would: 1) conserve and enhance Yellowstone River riparian, wetland, and sagebrush-steppe habitats; 2) expand public recreational opportunities along the Lower Yellowstone River; and 3) expand opportunity for a cooperative farming lease in partnership with a local agricultural producer. The Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation purchased this parcel through the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust to help bridge the acquisition for FWP. If approved, FWP would purchase the parcel at the appraised value of \$900,000. Funding for the acquisition would be derived from a combination of Habitat Montana and Migratory Bird Wetland Program funds.

Public Involvement Process & Results: An environmental Assessment was released for a 30-day public comment period on April 5, 2024. A decision notice and summary of comments received by the department will be provided as a supplement to this coversheet when available.

Alternatives & Analysis: The commission has two options. They could choose not to support this proposal, which would maintain the status quo. The Isaac Homestead WMA would remain as two separate parcels with public access challenges for the east unit. In time, the private parcel separating the WMA parcels could be converted or developed, which could negatively affect the WMA. Alternatively, the commission could support this proposal, allowing FWP to proceed with the acquisition, resulting in the benefits as previously mentioned.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission approve acquisition of the proposed addition to Isaac Homestead WMA. This would improve public accessibility across the WMA, expand conservation, and provide additional opportunity for a cooperative farming lease on existing farm ground.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve acquisition of the addition to the Isaac Homestead WMA as proposed.